

# Easing pain and suffering at Casey House

By Kathleen Sandusky

As Canada's first free-standing HIV/AIDS hospice, now a specialty hospital, Casey House continually refines new approaches to relieving suffering and pain. At our founding in 1988, our care was primarily palliative, and we incorporated complementary therapies as a way to ease pain in the final days of our residents' lives. Today, our more than 200 residents and community clients benefit from tremendous advances in treatment. But severe, multiple side effects can result from long-term antiretroviral drug therapies and the complications of HIV/AIDS. Further, many of the people we care for today have experienced deep isolation or marginalization due to poverty, mental illness, substance dependency, or the burdens of a long and stigmatizing illness. By supporting our clients' well-being and ability to heal, complementary therapies are proving to be as vital as ever in our approach to care at Casey House.

Our interdisciplinary team works closely with each resident and client to determine the holistic care plan that will work best for him or her, with complementary therapies available in addition to conventional medical treatments. "People are unique in their experience of illness and pain," says Karen de Prinse, Director of Professional Practice & Chief Nursing Executive at Casey House. "We seek to customize our treatment to that individual experience by exploring the client's perspectives and wishes, offering a variety of approaches, interventions and supports, and working with clients to identify how they see their lives, and our role within it. We've found this array of traditional and complementary therapies to be beneficial for our clients and their care at Casey House."

Complementary therapies accessible at Casey House include massage and aromatherapy (accompanied by music), chiropractic care and acupuncture. Some clients also find comfort and healing in accessing culture-based therapies such as aboriginal drumming and Buddhist chants.

For some clients at Casey House, therapeutic touch is helpful in managing pain. Jim Donovan, an RN at Casey House for over 20 years, began his training in touch therapy in the mid-1990's. He has helped many residents using these techniques, always after careful discussion with the individual. "In some cases, pain and suffering will persist, despite our best

technologies and therapies," explains Donovan. "This can be overwhelming and debilitating, not only for the person we're caring for, but also for their caregivers. Therapeutic touch is a way to transcend that sense of helplessness, with the nurse and resident entering into a reciprocal experience of healing."

Like Reiki and Pranic healing, therapeutic touch is based on the ancient Chinese concept of Chi. Sessions typically last

10 to 15 minutes, as practitioners move their hands lightly over a person's body, without actually touching. The practice is thought to "unblock" energy within the body, supporting the management of stress, injury, and pain. When practiced effectively, clients and caregivers alike report an enhanced sense of calm and well-being, strengthening both for the journey ahead.

Donovan describes a recent

client who was experiencing severe gastric pain due to complications over a long history of antiretroviral regimes. "He came to Casey House for care in starting a new ARV treatment, but because his experiences had been so difficult before, he was feeling terrible anxiety," recalls Donovan. "So we did a touch therapy session one hour before each treatment. He would experience a relaxation response, becoming cen-

tred and emotionally prepared before the next dose of the new medication."

"Therapeutic touch can be a way to demonstrate that we value an individual's life, that we will take the time to explore whatever works for that person," explains Donovan.

*Kathleen Sandusky is a Communications Specialist at Casey House.*

## The "B-B-Q King"

*"No doubt about it. A permanent spinal cord injury will depress you... but you have to work through and realize that life goes on and still has a lot of wonderful surprises for you."*

*Frank Nunnar*



Frank Nunnaro is a regular guy with a real talent for barbeque cooking. He was a produce manager at an Orillia IGA when he had a terrible car accident that damaged his spinal cord and left him a paraplegic.

After intensive rehabilitation at Lyndhurst Hospital, and with the loving help from his wife Vicky, Frank has gone on to become one of the great BBQ hosts of the century. Every year in the middle of the summer, Frank and Vicky host an amazing barbeque party at their Wasaga Beach home. Frank likes to think of it as a real celebration of life. We like to think of it as a testimony to the human spirit.

We are honoured to have represented Frank Nunnaro in his lawsuit and to count Frank as a friend and one of the many everyday heroes we have been able to help.

**THOMSON, ROGERS** Barristers and Solicitors  
416-868-3100 Toll free 1-888-223-0448  
[www.thomsonrogers.com](http://www.thomsonrogers.com)

*YOUR ADVANTAGE, in and out of the courtroom*

**Thomson**  
Rogers